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Editorial

COLLEGE EDITIONS OF THE CLASSICS

At no time in the history of classical studies has there been a larger number of editions of Latin and Greek authors for the use of college students than at present. They pour from the press in a steady stream under the auspices of half a dozen different series. They are equipped with Introductions which sometimes break out in alarming manifestations of paleographical or syntactical profundity, with Analyses of argument or content, with Commentaries bristling with Latin and Greek quotations, and sometimes even with Critical Appendices, Excursuses, "Selected" Bibliographies, and other side-shows of erudition. All this in a college edition! All this dust of the ages thrown into the eyes of boys and girls whom we are always assuring that the classics afford the best means of literary culture!

A recent edition of the *De senectute* is a case in point. In it we find about 160 pages of introductory, explanatory, and exegetical matter to some 40 pages of text. With glaring ruthlessness the editor has performed the always supererogatory task of breaking a butterfly on a wheel. The *De senectute* is one of the simplest of Cicero's dialogues. With the possible exception of two or three chapters, it presents no serious difficulties of language or interpretation; it involves no profound philosophical speculations, historical difficulties, or chronological puzzles. Its style is as lucid as it is charming. Why, then, these many strata of editorial overlay? In the Introduction, besides sections on "Cicero's Method in the Cato Major," "The Real Cato," "The Ideal Cato," "The Career of Cato," "Cato's Works," "Circumstances in Which the Dialogue

Was Written," we find a description of "Manuscripts and Editions" and, wonders of wonders, a "Nomenclator Senum." This is an imposing compilation consisting of a number of lists: men cited as *senes* in the *Cato Maior*, ranging from Homer to Arganthonius, king of Tartessus; men who *might* have been cited, but who, presumably for their sins, are only mentioned in another connection, as Hannibal and Archytas of Tarentum. That Epicurus is not mentioned in the honor-roll is conjectured to be due to Cicero's prejudices against the Epicureans! But our editor is one who, having put his hand to the plow, does not turn back. He gives another list consisting of those the omission of whose names is noteworthy, and here classified under the different categories of philosophers, poets, orators, etc., we seem to have the name of every old hero who ever tottered into the eighties or nineties in ancient Greece or early republican Rome. Then come the old men whose lives connect the age of Cato with that of Cicero; then examples of old age from the time of the Roman Empire; emperors, empresses, church fathers, what not—the whole an astounding conspectus of senile activity. After reading it we can only wonder why Methuselah and the other patriarchs have been excluded. Their temporal records are much more impressive than even that of Arganthonius, king of Tartessus. We are almost tempted to assume anti-Semitic prejudices on the part of our editor.

The postludes of this edition consist of an Appendix containing critical and supplementary notes, an Index of Persons, and an Index to the Notes.

What becomes of the poor little dialogue under all this? Surely no unprejudiced person can claim that these dusty, musty compilations should have a place in a textbook intended primarily for college freshmen.

Many other examples of similar editorial excesses might be given. A comparatively new edition of Juvenal contains among its introductory matter a section upon the manuscripts and scholia of wholly unnecessary length, and a "brief" bibliography of about a hundred titles. Indeed, the most conspicuous feature of this edition is the care that has evidently been taken to collect every note and article that has ever been written on Juvenal. We see here a tumul-

tuous bibliographical riot that it would be hard to parallel. Not simply titles of editions are given, but whole lists of reviews of these editions. In the Commentary we do not find notes only, but, in large numbers, notes upon notes, with files of references to this, that, and the other journal. Of what value is this mass of material to the college student? He has not yet reached the age when the sound of a German title impresses him. The mention of Bezenberger's *Beiträge* or of the *Archiv für lateinische Lexicographie und Grammatik* does not open up for him long vistas of research and scholarship; it only bewilders and discourages him. He is as yet *barbarus*.

Editors sometimes attempt to defend the presence of such matter in college textbooks by claiming that it is not intended for the student at all, but for the instructor. This defense is manifestly flimsy. It goes without saying that college textbooks should be edited for college students. Nor is this material of much service to instructors, for they, when they want information on the subjects treated, will prefer to go to the more comprehensive and authoritative treatises.

Such editions, then, fail because they endeavor to accomplish at one and the same time two distinct aims. They try to meet the needs of both students and instructors. The result is that they meet the needs of neither. Present conditions in classical studies call for two kinds of editions: comprehensive editions for advanced students and instructors, and small editions, with brief introductions and short notes, for college students. The extent to which instructors are now using in the classroom editions that contain the text alone is an indication of the kind of college text-book that will succeed in the future.

In conclusion, there is one other aspect of these elaborate college editions which should be pointed out, namely the academic waste that is involved in their making. The editors are, for the most part, men who have proved the soundness of their scholarship by their university records, by their writings in the journals, and in other ways. Why, then, should they, competent and highly trained, spend their time upon books which, although they require an enormous amount of labor, serve no useful purpose?